

## A New Dawn for Prehistory

Pupils should be taught about:

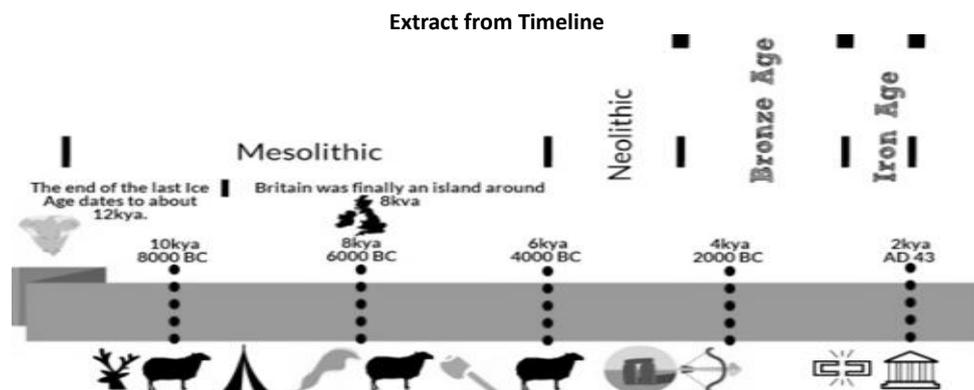
- changes in Britain from the Stone Age to the Iron Age

### Examples (non-statutory)

This could include:

- late Neolithic hunter-gatherers and early farmers, for example, Skara Brae
- Bronze Age religion, technology and travel, for example, Stonehenge
- Iron Age hill forts: tribal kingdoms, farming, art and culture

From this September teachers across England will be teaching Changes in Britain from the Stone Age to the Iron Age. Where previously, British history began only when the Romans successfully invaded and annexed the country, now teachers will be explaining the arrival of *Homo sapiens* for the first time, the adoption of agriculture, and the technological advance of smelting metal. Unfortunately for the first few cohorts of pupils, some of whom will be as young as 7, their teachers in the main know very little about this period. It does not help that in the last twenty years it has become more difficult for archaeology graduates to train to be teachers, the excuse being that there was no subject on the curriculum that demanded their knowledge and expertise. Well, now there is. It also does not help that the non-statutory guidance on the national curriculum is wrong. It suggests to teachers to compare "Late Neolithic" hunter-gatherers with farmers, such as at Skara Brae. Here it should read Mesolithic, of course. And consider the requirement to look at Bronze Age religion, as illustrated by Stonehenge – which is not a Neolithic monument at all!



Despite these shortcomings, there is an opportunity that could help teachers. Anyone who knows about this period of history can approach their local school in September and offer to give a talk. As indicated above, the curriculum only mentions two places to study, Stonehenge and Skara Brae. However, most teachers that I have spoken to want to know about their local area, which offers members of BAS an opportunity in Buckinghamshire schools. In June some colleagues and I ran a training day for teachers at Bucks County Museum. Some of the main areas where teachers needed support were in the basic time period names and dates, the range of evidence and how archaeology works. Other educators have been struck at teachers' ideas of how technology progressed. This is an extract of a blog post by Bryan Sitch of Manchester Museum: "it was not entirely surprising to hear one teacher say that Stone Age people used flint until they realised it didn't work for them and they invented something better like bronze and then iron."

It is also unclear when in the Stone Age teachers are meant to start. The curriculum is unclear, as mentioned before, but it seems to mean after the end of the last Ice Age, but this ignores nearly a million years of history, and the wonderful Happisburgh footprints. Many teachers want to teach cave art, and to do that they will have to start in the Upper Palaeolithic.

At the moment, most organisations are just getting to grips with the changes to the history curriculum and preparing resources to help teachers. In the meantime, if you know any local schools or teachers and can help them find out about their local prehistoric sites, they'd love to hear from you.

**Kim Biddulph**  
Council Member, BAS  
Director, Schools Prehistory